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The Advantages of Choosing a Multilingual Perspective in Teaching  
English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)

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## **Acknowledgments**

*To Ángela, Angélica, Isidro and my tutor.*

## **Abstract**

In its role as a lingua franca, English is being influenced by its non-native speakers. Under this phenomenon and in a globalised world we should consider that if English speaker has changed, teachers should change as well in order to adapt themselves to this new paradigm. For that reason, I will try to present some linguistic and cultural advantages that may bring to favour a multilingual teaching over a traditional nativelike-based teaching. Advantages that will overall benefit multilingual communities where English is a lingua franca.

**Key words:** English as a lingua franca (ELF), globalization, multilingualism, Native English teacher (NET), Non-native English teacher (NNET), English Language Teaching (ELT)

## **Resumen**

En su papel como lengua franca, el Inglés está siendo influido por sus hablantes no nativos. Bajo este fenómeno y en un mundo globalizado debemos considerar que si los hablantes del Inglés han cambiado aquellos que lo enseñan también deben adaptarse a este nuevo paradigma. Es por ello que en este ensayo pretendo exponer aquellas ventajas que tiene favorecer la enseñanza con un profesor multilingüe por encima de la enseñanza tradicional con un profesor nativo. Ventajas que sobretodo favorecen a comunidades multilingües en las que el Inglés actúa como lengua franca.

**Palabras clave:** Inglés como lengua franca, globalización, multilingüismo, profesor nativo, profesor no nativo, Enseñanza del Inglés.

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## 1. Introduction

When using and learning a foreign language, we are sometimes under the pressure of resembling like a native speaker of that language. If the participants in this learning are non-native speakers, they may be discouraged by the imposition of nativelike standards when they try to express themselves in that language. In these days, when English is a contact language around the world we need to reconsider if native teachers are still the best option when it comes to teach English, especially in multilingual environments.

Since the end of the 80s it has been accepted the categorisation of Braj Kachru, a classification that goes from the more proficient speakers to those who are just learners or users of English. The three circles model in fact “charts the historical spread and functional differences of English by distinguishing the Expanding Circle (where English was used as a foreign language), Outer Circle (where English was a second language, with well-established local norms since colonial times), and the Inner Circle (which claimed ownership and the establishment of norms)” (Canagarajah 2006). Having this model in mind, those countries who belong to the expanding circle may not have the same purposes as inner circle speakers when using the language. They are using English as an additional language and they should not be obliged to achieve full proficiency in English in order to communicate efficiently.

Therefore, in this following paper I want to argue that in the context of a globalized world where different multilingual communities from the expanding circle use English as a Lingua Franca for intranational and international communication, a bilingual or multilingual teaching and learning methodology is more advantageous. The native based teaching of English could no longer be successful since its main goal is to

conform native speakers' standards among those who use English as an additional language. However, English Language Teaching (ELT) methodologies should look beyond the nativelike paradigm in order to meet non-native speakers' main goal that is a successful and efficient communication.

To do so, I will look at several definitions of English as a lingua franca (ELF) in order to understand some basic features of this phenomenon. This aspect will be decisive to understand that English nowadays is less owned by inner circle countries than in the past. Having this aspect in mind, I will end up this section by enumerating some important roles that ELF has in countries where English is used in coexistence with other languages.

Secondly, I will continue with aspects about native and non-native English teacher. These aspects will reveal that education is focused on gaining native-like competence. In fact, it is based on the idealization of the native English teacher. That romanticizing has led to fallacies that has been widely spread and accepted. In contrast, we find the non-native teacher, a figure that has been rather underestimated in ELT but whose previous experience as a second language learner could match the learning of English by multilinguals.

Finally, in the third part of this essay I will identify why the multilingual speaker model is the best model to teach English in multilingual settings. Not only with a native speaker they will be centring to one single English but also because the multilingual teacher serves as a support in the learning process since learners may be more identified with him/her.



## 2. Defining ELF and its Roles in Multilingual Communities

English has become an extended lingua franca because certain historical events has motivated its expansion. Unlike “the original lingua franca [which] was a more or less neutral, simple, functionally reduced and geographically unbound idiom” ( Brosh 77), English as a lingua franca is a widely spread and complex phenomenon. Firstly, the fact that it is developing in a globalised world turns it into a language that is used outside its Anglophone borders. As has been said by Suresh Canagarajah (2006), “in the recent forms of globalization marked by new technology, transnational economic and production relationships, and the porous nature of nation state boundaries, English has become a contact language for a wider range of communities (outside the former British empire)” (197).

The fact that English as a lingua franca is connected to this worldwide phenomenon turns English into the current most spoken lingua franca nowadays. In the 2019 report of Ethnologue, English was spoken by 1,132M people. As this research centre for language intelligence describes in detail “English is present in 146 countries”. What these figures represent is a language influenced mainly by its non-native speakers rather than a language that is owned by its native speakers.

English as a lingua franca has another important trait: its chameleonic presence in multiple domains. As Mackenzie points out, “as well as being used – often in a very simple form – by tourists, ELF is prominent in international politics and diplomacy, international law, business, the media, and in tertiary education and scientific research” (2). Generally speaking, ELF seems to be a language that goes from the most colloquial usages to the most academic ones.

When it comes to defining ELF we encounter different perspectives but all of them imply that ELF is variable, flexible and dynamic since it is a language used by different L1 speakers, although native speakers may participate as well. The following sources from different researchers may serve to exemplify ELF:

“In its purest form, ELF is defined as a contact language used only among non–mother tongue speakers” (Jenkins 160).

“A way of referring to communication in English between speakers with different first languages” (Seidlhofer 339).

Nevertheless, from the ideological perspective some authors still relate ELF to its colonial and imperial past “English is fraudulently projected as a de-territorialised language that is disconnected from its original sources and even from the driving forces behind its expansion worldwide” (Phillipson 315-6). However, other scholars such as Mackay disagree, in his words: “English has achieved this status not because of a growth in the number of native speakers but rather because of an increase in the number of individuals in the world today who believe it is to their benefit to acquire English as an additional language” (1).

Multilingual communities are examples where English is present as a contact language. As has been said, English has had a colonial and imperial past. Consequently, it is licit that Asian or African countries, where linguistic diversity is rich, could be reticent to open to ELF since “to imagine a speech community entirely rid of such power politics is to deflect the whole discussion from the real to an ideal world” (Rajagopalan 113). But again, “globalization reinserts the need for English for postmodern life” by making “national borders porous and [bringing] linguistic influences from outside” (Canagarajah 2006). This means that some multilingual

communities are moved by the demands of a globalized world where English may have different purposes and roles.

In countries such as Nigeria English is valued for being a window to a world where everyone knows some English. According to a research conducted by Juliane House “in Nigeria English has become one of the languages available for use and it is its communication potential which makes people decide to use English” (560). Moreover, English as a lingua franca may serve in multilingual communities as a language to help in political conflicts since it is supposed to be nationless. House asserts that “in Eastern Europe ... English is welcome as an auxiliary language and as a means to discard Russian, which had been imposed, but eventually failed as a language of inner-state communication” (561).

Finally, according to Jack Wong in Singapore, English is one of the four official languages (Malay, Tamil and Mandarin Chinese). There, it has been specially treated because it has helped to boost their economy. From these data, we infer that the learning of this language is important in multilingual communities since it may carry out different roles and help those societies economically, politically, etc. The question that remains now is who should teach English if it is more used and influenced in non-Anglophone countries?

### 3. Native Teacher vs Multilingual Teacher in English Language Teaching

English has been marketed in worldwide educational programmes as the language you need to know in order to gain access to politics, science, the media, etc. As a result, the acquisition of English has changed from been transmitted from the diaspora of native speakers to what is called *macroaquisiton* (Brut Griffler 2002). In Mackay's

scholarly article, she affirms that “the current spread of English is ... due to individuals acquiring English as an additional language for international and in some contexts intranational communication” (2). This means that the current spread of English as a lingua franca is certainly the consequence of its learning in expanding circle communities where it is used for inner and outer communication.

These findings reveal that, since there is a growing interest in English, the demand for teachers has also increased. When it comes to hire new teachers in educational institutions, the native English teacher is the most attractive one to the audience. In fact, it has always been the most deified whereas the non-native teacher has always been discredited. The main consequence of these prejudices are that native teachers’ parameters are the ones that have served as a model to design educational curricula. According to Rajagopalan “it was the figure of the native speaker that invariably served as the yardstick with which to measure the adequacy of policy decisions, the efficacy of methods and authenticity of materials, the learner’s proficiency, and so on” (114). On the other hand, we find the non-native teacher whose characteristics are less accentuated but which are even more functional. For instance, they may know better how to solve the possible troubles related to learning English because they have achieved its mastery as an additional language. In essence, Medgyes affirms that they “have empathy with and an understanding of the problems that their students face” (qtd. in Kirkpatrick 29).

It is important to bear in mind when comparing both models that an English native speaker teacher is not prepared from its childhood to teach the language. He/She has not got a God-given trait to teach English, they are experts in their own language. In fact, in statistics shown by Derivry-Plard and Griffin in a research study with 105 Native Teachers as participants, “49% of the 105 NETs working in the French

education system who completed a questionnaire about their professional identity in 2009, had an English degree ... which indicates that NESTs do not enter the profession merely by default” (43).

However, the problem is not who is more expert than the other, but why the native speaker teacher has been mystified and why it has been decided that expanding circle countries need to adjust to nativelike norms in order to communicate in English. Although NETs are qualified teachers it is not a matter of preparation but a matter of equal rights and non-discrimination in the job market, a matter of having methods based on multilingual learners and finally, it is a matter of giving voice and power to non-native English teachers. It does not suffice to say that they outnumber native speakers, we also need to change the prejudice of learners of English as failures.

As David Graddol (2006: 83) puts it, ‘Within traditional EFL (English as a Foreign Language) methodology there is an inbuilt ideological positioning of the student as outsider and failure – however proficient they become.’ EFL necessarily ‘can and does tolerate high levels of failure’; indeed, it might even be said to be ‘designed to produce failure’ (qtd. in Mackenzie 8).

It is essential to change this preconception of students/users as ‘failures’ when they are learning and using a foreign language. In this sense, the only path is to take a multilingual teaching methodology in which they may feel included instead of excluded from the language that he/she has chosen to learn.

#### 4. The Best Teacher for ELT in Multilingual Communities

In a scholarly article about the lingua franca approach to The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries written by Kirkpatrick, this author describes some goals that are convenient in the pedagogy of ELF. Among them, we find mutual intelligibility, intercultural competence, the training of local multilingual teachers as the best option, etc. When he explains how the multilingual teacher of English is useful for the pedagogy of ELF he affirms that:

“the lingua franca approach really *requires* non-native speaker teachers of English. Remembering that the language learning goal is not to approximate native speaker norms, but to be able to interact successfully with fellow Asian multilinguals, it follows that an Asian multilingual who is proficient in English and who has the relevant qualifications represents the most appropriate teacher” (Kirkpatrick 29).

We need to bear in mind that the lingua franca approach involves the presence of non-native speakers due to the fact that “English is being shaped at least as much by its non-native speakers as by its native speakers” (Seidlhofer 339). Consequently, the best option is to adjust the teaching of English depending on its environment. Regarding this issue, Manara claims that “learning is also about personalizing what had just been learned into one’s own context and situation” (198) and so is teaching.

Following this idea of a customized English teaching is where the multilingual teacher of ELT appears. One of the main reasons is that the multilingual speaker can easily adapt to different situations having more resources than a native teacher does: “the multilingual speaker engages with the shifting and fluid situations in everyday life

to learn strategies of negotiation and adaptation for meaning-making” (Canagarajah 2007).

This is important not only because their linguistic repertoire is broader but it could also avoid “the denial of the right of L2 users to sound as if they come from a particular place [this] is an issue of power; native speakers are not treated in the same way. It is acceptable for a speaker of English to sound as if he/she comes from London, Chicago, or Auckland but not from Paris, Beijing, or Santiago” (Cook 240) They will be able to speak with his/her own accent without being judged for sounding like a non-native user of English. In fact, this is one of the defining features of using English as a lingua franca, according to Mauranen (2003:517):

“speakers should feel they can express their identities and be themselves in L2 contexts without being marginalised on account of features like foreign accents, lack of idiom, or culture-specific communicative styles as long as they can negotiate and manage communicative situations successfully and fluently” ( qtd. in Mackenzie 5).

What is meaningful about these features of multilingual speakers is that they could apply these advantages to the classroom in order to facilitate intelligibility and learning. This type of learning would become less focused on failure in the foreign language as well as being more sensitive with local usages and foreign accents. In Kirpatrick’s words, “it is important to establish a classroom philosophy through which the English language learner is not judged against native speaker norms ... but is judged as a language learner who is developing multilingual proficiency” (30).

Those who teach English in this context may serve as a bridge between their own linguistic knowledge and that of the additional language since they have the

cognitive and linguistic capacity of moving in both scenarios. Penny Ur suggests in her conference about the implications for language teaching of EIL that monolingual and intranational native speakers are not as flexible as multilingual speakers who are able to understand different accents. She also adds that people who understand or speak English around the world are much more flexible in understanding new expressions, vocabulary, structures, etc

Although sometimes the differences between Englishes are excessive as “the gap that separates NNEs from NESs can be overstated (Mackenzie 5). Some authors maintain that there is no longer an English to teach but a wide variety of Englishes. According to Ur “we need to teach a diverse set of Englishes”. The best option, then, is to visibilize all these small nuances that separates one English from another; to choose teaching “Englishes” instead of “English” as a way to adapt to a multilingual reality.

## 5. Conclusion

This essay has set out to explore the implications of choosing teachers that are qualified in English as well as speaking their languages in contexts where English is used as a contact language. What has been concluded after analysing what is the phenomenon of English as a lingua franca is that even though English is a language with a colonial and imperial baggage, nowadays it is more influenced by its non-native speakers than by its native speakers. Moreover, in multilingual communities ELF operates as a language that serves different roles as a nationless language that enhances economic, political and social relationships.

In the following section, I have briefly presented the native teacher and the non-native. I have concluded that both are equally valid since both of them are experts in the language. However, in practice, the non-native teacher is always discredited and



marginalised by educational institutions. Therefore, a change is needed not only because an education based on the native standard model is unrealistic but also because learners of that foreign language are pressured to follow that model, and criticised if they do not fulfil it.

Finally, I have attempted to point out why the best option to achieve a more inclusive model is the multilingual teacher model. Multilingual teachers are aware of their own source language accents and culture as well as being experts in English. This is a more realistic and sensitive approach taking into account that English is used as a lingua franca. For that reason, English is no longer a “monolithic language” but a means of communication that needs to be seen for multiple perspectives, not only from the Anglophone angle.

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